

The Comeback Kid

A Jack & Daniel Slash Story by Biblio



Title: The Comeback Kid

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Feedback: Please, and thank you: to biblio-fb@jd-divas.com

Rating: R

Pairing: Jack and Daniel

Category: Character Study. First Time. Romance.

Season/Spoilers: Mid-Season 4

Series: Sunday Vignettes

Synopsis: Jack O'Neill, obstinate Airman-Of-Steel, is annihilated by an overly honest archaeologist in a slump.

Warnings: None.

Notes: What more could an exhausted archivist possibly want? Just one more story to have to deal with... Happy birthday, dear Michelle :)

Thanks: To Marcia and to Phee, from alpha to beta.

Date: 05 Feb 2005



"Daniel is sick?" Jack repeated incredulously. "*Daniel?*"

"Is sick," Janet Fraiser confirmed, returning her attention to her computer and a towering stack of medical files that almost filled her desk.

"Daniel can't be sick," Jack confidently asserted, blandly ignoring these and sundry other signs he was cluttering up her office. He strolled deeper into enemy territory, strategically occupied the chair in Fraiser's line of sight and prepared to engage.

"Daniel has been *dead* and he didn't let it slow him down," he reminded her pointedly.

"Well, today, he's sick," Fraiser reiterated patiently, not lifting her eyes from the very important work on her monitor. "It's not the end of the world," she added absently, taking the uppermost file and opening it with a faint sigh.

"It could be," Jack contradicted with some justification. "Today. It could be the end of the world. Literally the end. Today."

Fraiser looked up at him, her brows arching questioningly at his annoying persistence.

"Which is why Daniel is never sick," Jack concluded smugly.

"And yet..." Fraiser telegraphed several searching looks around her small office. "He's not here." She returned her attention to the folder. "If you're concerned about Daniel, maybe you should talk to him," she suggested mildly.

"I tried," Jack admitted reluctantly, glowering. "I called." *Several* times. "He's not picking up."

Fraiser smiled and took an irresistible opening. "That would be because he's..."

"Sick," they chorused together.

"He doesn't require your permission for that, Colonel," Fraiser continued smoothly.

Jack prudently chose not to dignify this with a response. Her ability to needle him extended far beyond the verbal, unfortunately.

Fraiser smiled again. "Maybe he just needed to take a break. Look at it from Daniel's perspective," she invited. "He's had a rough time of it these past months."

"I'm aware of that, Doctor," Jack said stiffly.

"He not only lost his wife, but she died at Teal's hands. Right in front of Daniel," Fraiser went on as if he hadn't spoken. "He had to give up her baby, the child she sacrificed everything to save, the child he'd sworn to her he would protect. Then he had to give up his grandfather, his only living relative."

"No loss there," Jack snorted, unyielding in his dislike of the selfish old bastard.

"Daniel's been tortured."

"So have I," Jack argued stubbornly. Not even counting this conversation.

"He almost died from acute appendicitis, he had to cope with his teammates being missing and presumed dead for more than a week, while he was supposed to be recuperating from surgery, I might add, and then had to give the order to blow up that infested submarine, incidentally killing you and Teal'c, to save the world from the Replicators," Fraiser recited inexorably, practically ticking the traumas off her fingers. "He was kidnapped, brutalised and almost eaten alive by an Unas, and on his rescue, had to be told that *you* had killed his best friend." She put on her authoritative C.M.O. face. "I'd say that entitled anyone to take a little time off, even Daniel."

Unable to adequately counter this litany of lousy luck, Jack shifted uncomfortably under her sudden penetrating gaze. "In self-defence," he said sullenly. "Rothman. It *was* self-defence. I had no choice. You know that. Daniel knows that."

"Lives were on the line," Fraiser agreed encouragingly.

"Exactly!"

"Hardly the end of the world," Fraiser murmured, eyes on her screen once more. "To lose the people you love, your family, give up on most everything that's been important to you, suffer insanity, isolation, torture, even the erasure of your identity, face your own mortality and that of your friends." She shrugged elegantly. "I guess you're right, Colonel. No big deal. All in a day's work for someone like Daniel. The stakes here are higher every day."

"And that's exactly why Daniel never gets sick," Jack insisted, regrettably coming off more bitch than bull in the face of superior firepower. "He's the original Comeback Kid. The boy is *resilient*. No one, and I mean no one, bounces back faster."

"Whatever you say, Sir." Fraiser directed another slightly sarcastic look around her archaeologist-free office. "And yet..."

"He's fine." Even Jack could hear the whining hint of uncertainty beginning to shade his tone.

"I'm sure he's happy knowing we all believe that," Fraiser said softly, pushing all kinds of nasty implications to the surface.

Like Daniel's team leader and *actual* best friend not knowing what was going on with him. Not that there was anything *to* know. Death, insanity, torture and identity erasure aside, Daniel was just fine. If he wasn't fine, then Jack would know. He would know for sure. Only...Daniel still wasn't here.

Jack looked at Janet Fraiser. She looked steadily back at him.

It was apparent to both of them he'd exposed his flank, she'd kicked his ass and cut off any possibility of retreat. Naturally, rather than admit this, he felt obliged to go out fighting and chose to lay down some covering fire.

"I think you're dead wrong, Doc. I think the only 'tragedy' that actually shook Daniel recently is losing the ability to read really fast. But if it'll get you off my back, I'll go see him," Jack capitulated ungraciously, sliding off her chair, out of her office and into the waiting wall of Jaffa.

"Well?" Teal'c enquired solemnly.

"Apparently not. She insists Daniel is sick," Jack explained grudgingly, jerking his thumb in Fraiser's direction.

"Sick and tired," Fraiser agreed, materialising beside him to calmly cut off his escape. "I've suggested the colonel make the time to go see Daniel today," she informed Teal'c brightly, ensuring this would now in fact in happen. "Talk to him."

Teal'c inclined his head in respectful acknowledgement of her wishes. "I will speak with Daniel Jackson," he announced, turning on his heel and strolling away.

"You?" Jack snapped, unprepared for his homey to defect right in front of him. "What the?"

Fraiser glanced up at him, her lips twitching. "Maybe it's for the best," she suggested, smugly departing her field of victory.

Jack took off down the hallway after Teal'c. "You're kidding me, right?" he asked irritably, making several unwelcome and unfortunately well-signposted connections. "Are you two *seriously* suggesting what Daniel is sick of is *me*?"

Teal'c's expression was remarkably similar to the one Jack had just seen on Fraiser's face.

"I cannot speak for Dr. Fraiser," Teal'c responded calmly. "I have merely observed Daniel Jackson's desire to be apart from SG-1 on recent missions." He hesitated, slowed his pace, then turned to face Jack directly. "Nor have I missed his presence as I should," he admitted quietly.

"Carping, criticising, pointing out the flaws in our tactics and the moral defects in our orders and objectives?" Jack suggested more lightly than he guessed he actually felt.

"Indeed."

"Daniel will fight when it's necessary," Jack defended. "It's just that he doesn't think all our fights are necessary."

"You have given him the freedom to question your command," Teal'c acknowledged, either trying to be fair or laying blame where he thought it was due.

"I wouldn't put it *quite* like that," Jack demurred. "And I'm sure Daniel wouldn't."

"I believe this is what separates him from Major Carter and myself," Teal'c said thoughtfully.

"Realising that I'm *in* command?" Jack suggested dryly, surprised when Teal'c took him more seriously than he'd intended.

"It is a necessity Daniel Jackson no longer has the luxury to ignore. It has not escaped the attention of Major Carter or myself the focus of our recent missions has shifted from that of exploration to overtly securing strategic and technological military advantages." Again Teal'c hesitated. "Perhaps the place of Daniel Jackson on SG-1 is not so clear as it once was."

"You and Carter have been talking about this?" Jack asked tightly from a burst of unexpected, disturbingly possessive anger. "About Daniel's place on the team?" *His* team. And *his* choice Daniel was on his team.

"About his perception of that place," Teal'c carefully corrected Jack.

"And about us being better off without his perceptions getting in our way?" Jack demanded in a hard voice, refusing to give ground.

"In which we are only following your lead, Colonel O'Neill," Teal'c retorted. "You have said as much to Daniel Jackson. He does not forget. And nor do we."

"I was wrong," Jack said angrily. He even said he was *sorry* for it, for cryin' out loud. He'd paid for that mistake. The Eurondans had paid. And if Daniel wasn't making a fuss, Teal'c and Carter should get over it, already.

"Perhaps Daniel Jackson believes you were right," Teal'c suggested imperturbably.

"Daniel *never* thinks I'm right!"

For Jack, that was kind of the point. The crux of their difficult relationship. Whatever

else he'd been through with Teal'c and Carter, they hadn't been with him at the beginning. They hadn't walked through the Stargate with him that first time. They didn't know the man Jack had been.

Only Daniel did.

The connection they'd made back then was not blind, because Daniel had seen that man all too clearly, but it was enduring; he thought precisely because it was made in the worst of times. It was too personal to share, even now, no matter how people interpreted the latitude Jack allowed Daniel as a matter of course. His reasoning, and his feelings, Jack kept strictly to himself.

"Yet there have been many occasions when Daniel Jackson has believed he was wrong," Teal'c calmly changed tack.

"That's pretty much what Fraiser just said," Jack admitted, calming down somewhat.

He was more or less okay with the notion of a guilt-ridden, neglectful Teal'c wanting to be there for Daniel. Not going to let it happen of course, but pretty okay with it being Teal'c's problem and not his.

"Carter lying in wait around here too?" he asked in a milder tone.

Teal'c got another of those weird, loaded looks on his face. "Major Carter has been somewhat...preoccupied...of late," he hedged uncharacteristically.

Jack, who knew as well as Teal'c what she'd been preoccupied with, maintained a discouraging silence. What was supposed to stay in the room, he was not about to air in the hallway.

"As have you," Teal'c added, refusing to be rebuffed. "Of this too, Daniel Jackson has been aware."

"What?" Somehow, Jack highly doubted that was the case. Whether he and Carter had been obvious or not, and he didn't think they had been, hardly mattered.

Daniel was so addicted to the there and then, you generally had to get him through the gate, onto another planet and possibly at gunpoint before he'd admit defeat and join the rest of them in the here and now.

"None of us have missed his presence from SG-1 as we should," Teal'c said heavily.

"I have," Jack argued instinctively, and then felt ridiculous for doing it. He didn't

have to justify himself to Teal'c on this.

"When Dr. Rothman returned without warning to Stargate Command to inform us of the Unas attack," Teal'c stated in a measured, repressive tone. "We were not at that time certain Daniel Jackson was with him on P3X-888. Major Carter in fact sought confirmation of this before we began questioning Dr. Rothman."

"I..." Jack trailed off, cursing Teal'c's exceptionally clear recall of events.

There wasn't actually a defence he could muster against this. He had been distracted by Samantha Carter, by...possibilities.

He had no intentions towards her, no plans...the team *had* to come first, Carter was with him on that, and she had made the same choice he had. But God, it hadn't hurt him to know a woman like her could go for him, *really* go for him.

He'd never quite believed in the reality of his alternates, let alone the relationship that seemed key to their existence, but it had opened his eyes to his Sam Carter, taken him beyond the simple awareness of her as a striking, sexy woman.

Far beyond.

At some point he'd actually started listening to her instead of tuning her out and walking away, seeking her out, opening himself to being sought out. They'd spent time together, a whole lot of time. Not flirting, not exactly -- just...aware.

Feelings they danced around, that hadn't quite taken hold.

Possibilities.

Not being able to acknowledge it had given the whole thing an edge he couldn't quite bring himself to back down from, back off. Knowing what he could have if he would just reach out for it...

Teal'c's ironically elevated eyebrow finally caught his eye.

"Why would that concern Daniel?" Jack demanded, caught in the act of preoccupation and unable to back-pedal any more than he already had.

"At one time, O'Neill, you were wholly preoccupied with Daniel Jackson," Teal'c said evenly.

Preoccupied? Utterly dumbfounded, Jack gaped at Teal'c, certain the big guy couldn't

mean...this couldn't *possibly* be what it sounded like!

"Until your months of separation from him on Edora," Teal'c elaborated.

"I was separated from *everything*," Jack argued heatedly, stunned at the insinuation as much as the speed Teal'c was cutting secure ground out from under him.

He was hardly the man to wear his heart on his sleeve, let alone plastered to the Goodyear blimp it would take for Teal'c to start leaping to conclusions about him and Daniel. Jack's wife *left him* because she couldn't read him. Or because he wouldn't let her read him. So where in God's name was *Teal'c* getting *this*?

"Everything and everyone," Jack repeated forcefully.

"And yet it was Daniel Jackson whom you missed," Teal'c insisted, unmoved by Jack's denial.

"I had a *relationship* on Edora," Jack snapped, staggered by the directness of the allegation.

"What has one to do with the other?" Teal'c enquired, both eyebrows going up.

Shit! Jack groaned inwardly, glaring. Teal'c's confusion was genuine.

Already writhing on the hook of his too hastily asserted heterosexuality, Jack refused to offer up any more ammunition to be twisted against him.

Teal'c had only -- inadvertently -- drawn the dots.

Jack was the one who'd jumped to connect them.

Temporary insanity.

"How did I go from not missing Daniel enough to missing him too much in the space of one argument?" he complained bitterly, cursing his big fat mouth.

How was it that in any conversation, in *anything* to do with Daniel Jackson, he lost it? He completely frickin' lost it. Every damn time.

"Don't answer that," he added hastily, warding Teal'c off. "I have no idea what we're talking about," he said peevishly, marching off down the hallway towards the distant elevator.

"I too am no longer certain," Teal'c admitted, falling into step again with Jack.

Well, that was something! In the context of 'preoccupation,' Jack would take suspicious over certain.

He could kick himself for lifting the lid off of this particular can of worms.

Everything Teal'c had said could be taken on the level. In point of fact, all Teal'c had really been trying to say was maybe Daniel was feeling a little left out of things. Teal'c had this nasty habit of being literal and Jack wouldn't have believed it possible to get so rattled he could forget that.

It wasn't the big guy's fault he'd said exactly what he meant and what Jack had heard was...well, a lot of emotional crap he'd buried.

Buried and left far behind.

Jack miss Daniel?

Missed him like a hole in the head.

It appeared to be the one he kept his brain in.



There was only so long Jack was prepared to keep knock, knock, knocking on Daniel's door. There were limits to patience and he'd passed his around the time Janet Fraiser had first informed him Daniel was taking the day.

Sick leave, was she kidding?

And that was before her evil twin Teal'c got on his case.

All this fire-fighting had Jack on edge. His certainty he knew where Carter, Teal'c and Fraiser were at had taken a beating he wasn't going to get over in a hurry. He didn't have ready answers for the stingers launched at him by the people he knew best, questions they hadn't let him know were up for debate. He didn't have answers at all.

He was far less certain he knew what was going on with Daniel. His gut told him no way, no how was Daniel throwing himself a little pity party. His gut also told him he knew Daniel better than anyone else did, but then he thought he knew Carter, Teal'c

and Fraiser, and look how that worked out for him.

The three of them thought he was on a different planet to the rest of them.

So, he wanted to hear it from Daniel.

Unfortunately, he was alone in that. Daniel didn't want to hear from anyone right now. Deciding being ignored counted as exigent circumstances, Jack picked the lock. This took several seconds. He was quite justified in tossing in a lecture on security when Daniel raised the inevitable objections.

When he went into the apartment, things looked pretty much the way they were supposed to. The kitchen and dining table were tidy, the library table wasn't. In fact, eyeing the stacks of open books the archaeologist currently couldn't function without, Jack figured Daniel had pulled his latest illicit all-nighter and finally taken a knockout punch from Mr. Sandman.

He added getting some rest to the growing list of things they needed to discuss when he woke Daniel up.

He refused to let himself get all weirded out and distracted by being in Daniel's bedroom for the first time, despite the conversation he'd just had with Teal'c.

Instead, he focused exclusively on the Daniel-shaped lump hibernating under the quilt on a very big bed. The only parts of Daniel he could actually see were an errant foot protruding from the bottom of the quilt and a limp hand dangling towards the floor.

Jack intended to yell. Bellow in an authoritative manner from the safety of the bedroom door.

What he actually did was take himself right across the room to tuck in Daniel's foot.

Apparently.

He had hold of the quilt before he realised he'd moved.

This made him bellow from the foot of the bed.

Daniel jerked violently, then sharply withdrew his hand – and his toes – under the quilt.

"I know you're in there," Jack snorted, giving the nearest appendage a prod for

emphasis.

Daniel's initial response to this was muffled and profane.

"I guess this isn't the best time to ask how you're doing," Jack observed, a short distance from the eruption.

"I was perfectly fine until you gave me a heart attack!"

"Perfectly fine apart from being sick?" Jack enquired, wanting to be clear on this. Fraiser -- and the big guy -- would be asking questions later.

Daniel growled.

He didn't ask what Jack was doing there or how in hell he'd got into the apartment. Jack was Jack. Jack was there. End of story.

This struck Jack as being very much as it should be. Getting in Daniel's face was the natural order of things. Of course, Daniel's face was buried in a pillow and under a quilt, but Jack was with him in spirit.

"What's up?" he asked briskly. "What's going on with you?"

"Nothing. Nothing is what's going on with me. Not a thing."

It didn't sound like a line.

"You're not freaked out by torture, insanity, death or identity erasure?"

"What?"

"Obviously not."

"Are *you*?"

Jack thought he was sensing some hostility on Daniel's part.

"Only by Fraiser," he said cheerfully, starting to enjoy himself.

"Janet?"

"She insists you're sick. She insisted I come see you."

"I see."

Jack waited a while, but this appeared to be all Daniel had to say on the subject. He gave him another prod, just to be sure he hadn't fallen asleep again.

"Well, you came. You saw me. Duty done. Now you can go again," Daniel responded clearly and somewhat coldly. "Report back."

Like a good little colonel, Jack obligingly finished the unspoken thought.

"Don't let my broken door hit you on the way out, Jack. And don't forget to call me a locksmith."

"That's *cold*," Jack complained with a grin, not feeling the love.

He wished Fraiser was here to take them through her theory Daniel was so oppressed by Jack's high-handedness, he needed advance authorisation to be sick and breathe and stuff. This had apparently escaped Daniel's attention. Co-operation and indeed explanation were currently not on the table.

Teal'c's contention Daniel was feeling unloved and unwanted by the rest of the gang might be closer to the mark, but since when did Daniel take things personally? He'd never nursed an injury or a grudge Jack knew of.

Even burning the midnight oil was something Daniel did as a matter of course, in the teeth of Jack's strenuous objections. A couple of hours sleep and he would have been hitting the books again, not loitering incommunicado under the quilt.

This...bore further investigation.

"If nothing's wrong with you and nothing's going on with you, what's with the Yertle The Turtle impression?" Jack enquired, giving the edge of the quilt a shake.

"Now, Jack. Go now. Please."

"Sick *and* tired. That's what Fraiser said."

"She's absolutely right. Now, can you go?"

"Sick of me?" Jack joked because he kind of had to.

He had to know. On a level that always made him uncomfortable if he looked at it too closely or for too long, he had this need for the two of them to be okay.

A chronic need.

"Come on, Daniel. Spill," Jack ordered. "I'm not budging until you do. And I've got the whole day to torture you," he added, ramping up the threat. Doctor's orders. "So, I ask again. Sick? Of me?"

Under the quilt, Daniel sighed.

"Look...Jack..." he said quietly. "Just forget about this. You've moved on. I get that."

"Moved where?" Jack asked cautiously, wondering if Teal'c was right after all and his command, or rather his alleged abuse of it, really was about to be used in evidence against him. He was almost ready to hear it. It wouldn't be the first shock of his day.

"I wish I'd realised I was in competition before I lost you to Sam, but I didn't," Daniel said wearily. "I'm not that smart. I wish you could get past me being the wrong gender, but you couldn't."

"The wrong..." Jack's voice failed him about the same time his heart gave out.

"I wish we'd had sex. I think it all would've worked out if we'd had sex."

A bottomless pit of raging unreality opened up and swallowed Jack whole.

"If only we'd both wanted it at the same time," Daniel mourned.

Jack had nothing.

Daniel was not supposed to know.

Daniel was *never* supposed to know.

No one was. Jack had put down those feelings with only Laira there to glimpse, if not comprehend his struggle.

Teal'c was right about one thing. Jack had missed Daniel on Edora. A part of himself. He was overwhelmed by feelings too raw and immediate, too hurtful to ignore, avoid or even explain away. Impossible, wrenching feelings, so he fought, he put them down.

Trapped or not, there had been no other resolution possible for him. When Laira came for him the last time, drunk and alone, he gave in. An end to it.

"Is that why you're here?" Daniel emerged from under the quilt, perfect, rumped, painfully honest, frightened and hopeful. Misinterpreting Jack's silence. Forgetting Fraiser had cared, Fraiser had sent him. "You wanted..." Bright, strained eyes squinted, searched Jack's face.

All that light faded.

Daniel lay back down, fixed his gaze up at the ceiling, crossed his hands neatly over his stomach.

"I'll see you tomorrow," he said, sounding hoarse. Dignity almost won out, but he seemed to Jack to shrink there in the bed. He looked...horrified.

It was not a look Jack had ever seen on his face before, no matter who or what Daniel had lost. Seeing it now, being the one to put it there, tore Jack up. He was not on any level prepared for it. He'd never suspected Daniel knew his feelings, never imagined he could return them. The secret had always been his to keep.

Or so he'd believed.

The truth...hurt.

Faced with it, Jack was not capable of crushing Daniel. Nothing else mattered to him but making this right. Nothing.

"I wanted," he choked, knowing -- feeling exactly what Daniel was feeling.

Daniel swallowed hard, reached unsteadily across and folded down a corner of the quilt. It could've come across as spitting in Jack's eye, a challenge, but it was not easy for Daniel to do. His hand trembled.

Jack toed off his shoes, shucked his jacket where he stood and got in the bed. He had no idea what he was doing, what he would do or even what he would say, but then Daniel didn't either.

They lay in silence, in the bed; together, but distant, hardly occupying the same space, looking up at the ceiling.

Jack looked up and up and couldn't think.

Daniel suddenly rolled into him, into his side, put a quick, nervous arm across him. It had taken him all this time to work up to it.

Jack tucked one hand under his head, the other over Daniel's arm.

"Holy crap," he said, eventually.

Daniel didn't say he was sorry.

This hadn't taken any thought at all. No plans, no intentions, no consideration. No thought of himself. It hadn't even occurred to Jack to deny it, to lie his way out of it. It was just Daniel. Jack losing it around Daniel. Like always.

Jack shit-scared of the possibilities.

Daniel's head moved closer to his on the pillow. Jack moved too. His arm dropped around Daniel's shoulders, found a place and held on. His head shifted inch by inch until he felt Daniel's hair against his face.

Like crossing the room earlier, he didn't remember making each individual motion or even the choice, he was just there. With Daniel.

They looked at nothing, thought of nothing, and didn't talk some more.

"You slay me," Jack whispered shakily when the hand clenched in his t-shirt finally opened and curled naturally against the curve of his chest.

"I nailed you." Daniel would've been proud of this if he knew how it had happened. And if he wasn't petrified. "Did I get it wrong?" he asked haltingly. "You, I mean? It was the gender thing?"

Jack regretted Samantha Carter, that pleasant edge of wanting and holding back. Of having a choice. Here, and now, he was choice-less. Past the point of denial.

He was completely undone.

"The love thing."

Daniel's body jerked hard and he gasped as if Jack had punched him, a low, dirty blow. It wasn't meant to be.

If Jack had to tell the truth, he would tell only some of the truth. Only what he hoped it wouldn't hurt Daniel to know. Or maybe what it wouldn't hurt him for Daniel to know. Sex with Daniel -- that wouldn't need an instruction manual. Jack could have been down with that if not for the rest of it -- if not for feeling all *this*, if not for

wanting Daniel so badly. Being completely out of control.

He would never have got in Samantha Carter's bed.

No one did this to him.

Only Daniel.

And now Daniel knew it.

There was so much frustration in it, so much need and love and anger, Jack hadn't been able to get far enough away from it. He didn't want to be consumed by Daniel any more than he'd wanted to feel dead inside when they were separated, dead in a deep, difficult place, a pain Laura or Carter -- *no one* could touch.

Jack had been running and running, and now he could hardly tell if he'd been running from Daniel or to him.

"For a long time," he said. "I've loved you for a long time."

There were a handful of people Jack cared for, few he loved. His definition of the word -- of the feeling -- was probably screwed. He knew that. If it wasn't, he'd be with Carter instead of in over his head. The trouble was, when he said care, he meant care.

Love was this whole other thing for him. A burning thing.

"Me too," Daniel said quickly, just this side of hesitant. "Only I guess -- I think I was a lot more comfortable with the feeling because it never made me think -- why *you*?"

Honestly? Jack had tended to think why *me*. Hence his extended, all-inclusive cruise down the River DeNile.

"It wasn't gender," he tried to explain.

It was fear, if anything. Fear of having this one person, so wrong and so perfect for him, sliding into every part of him, knowing every dark part of him, filling him up, bringing him out. Jack needed to hold back, he needed to maintain. Be his own man. Only Daniel fit him like his other half, like a key. Opened him up. And now Daniel had him and hardly knew what to do with him, which was Jack's luck all over.

"Maybe we should just have sex," Jack suggested ironically. "You figured it would all work out if we just had sex."

He was not prepared for Daniel to sit up and shake and start stripping anyway. The ratty old t-shirt he had on for bed was balled up on the floor before Jack could even close his mouth and when Daniel lay back, arched and pulled down his thin sweats, Jack watched. He'd seen Daniel naked before, but only glimpsed him, never stared, never seen him hard and glittering.

Jack was moved to touch him. He realised the shaking wasn't fear but some other thing. Something new. Excitement. Daniel wanted him and was giving in to it, reaching out now to rub his hand over Jack's arm, his wrist and hand. Daniel brought his face close, right up to Jack's, touched him face to face, stayed there, rubbing against him, breathing him in, quick and shallow until he calmed, smiled sweetly, then slow and deep. At peace with his choice.

Daniel didn't kiss Jack, not then. But he was certain. He wanted. He slipped away and down, turned onto his belly in generous, silent invitation. Jack was moving too. Out of his clothes, spit and clear slick on his hand, on his cock. Down behind Daniel on the bed. His hands trembled too.

A burning thing.

They pushed, each of them pushed at the other. It worked for them. It always did. One gave, both gave. They came together, Jack sliding slowly into Daniel, all his weight on him, about as deep and *there* as Daniel needed him to be.

Jack wondered how it was possible to feel so unreal and wild and whole at the same time. How Daniel could do all this to him, just by being with him. Just by being Daniel.

They rocked together, still slow, slow and easy, as deep as they could go. Warm and close, quiet, reaching out to one another. Their fingers fumbled, found and held tight.

Jack's face shifted from Daniel's hair to soak the pillow with his sweat as he moved, made things good and right between them. He came closer, then closer still, touching Daniel's face in just that way Daniel had, caressing skin on skin while they loved.

They rocked until they ached, until they couldn't breathe. Until this was their world.

After, they slid into one another's arms.

"You're easy," Daniel observed with gentle satisfaction.

"I am," Jack sighed. It was about time.

Daniel smiled at Jack, smoothed a little sweat from his brow and kissed him.

There was a lot Daniel had to get out, had to have Jack know and understand about him, but nothing he would say. Instead he spoke to Jack with lips and tongue, with intimacy and a quiet joy.

If Daniel knew he'd just annihilated the hopes of a good and dear friend, if he knew how completely he'd won, it didn't show. All he knew or cared for now was Jack.

They kissed deeply and hungrily for the longest time, exploring one another with eager mouths and hands until it was natural for them to do this and to be this close.

Jack couldn't work out how it was he got here, how he got from three months beating down his feelings for Daniel to folding like a bad poker hand about three seconds after Daniel called him.

He felt like he'd been hit by a train.

"What...happened?" he asked plaintively. "Seriously. If you figure it out, you'll let me know, right?"

Daniel was no help. He'd started out his day in a pathetic slump, licking his wounds in private, and was ending it licking his colonel. The cure for what ailed him.

"It never occurred to me you knew how I felt. About you I mean," Jack admitted gruffly, not looking at Daniel. "Things would have played out...differently...if I had." He could hardly say if things would have played out better. He didn't know. But all he'd accomplished by running scared was hurting Daniel, Carter and himself before he came full circle.

Daniel didn't say it was okay. It wasn't.

Jack couldn't say it was okay, how far and how fast, how *easily* he'd fallen when faced by what he wanted most -- and least -- in this world. It wasn't.

They would adjust. It was what they did. And way out here in left field, all things were possible. They were kissing now.

"One thing I have to know." Jack felt a certain sense of grievance on this 'honesty is the best policy' thing. "When I asked what was bothering you, did it never occur to you to *lie*?"

"What did I have to lose?" Daniel stroked Jack's face and smiled. "Today -- I thought nothing would ever change between us. That I was too slow, too...late."

His smile twisted a little when Jack had nothing to say to this.

Carter's name wasn't going to come up between them. Not directly. They weren't that sure of each other yet and Jack's determination to get clear of Daniel, of his own feelings, it was too near. He'd almost got away with it.

If Daniel wasn't letting Jack off the hook for that, he also wasn't up to bringing it out in the open. Just getting Jack into bed had been enough of a shock to his system, even though he was right about the sex. They had worked out a lot.

"I thought I was ready to give in and let go of you. Be the good friend and move on." Daniel moved in to kiss Jack softly. "I was dead wrong."

"You're right, you know. You nailed me," Jack sighed, moth to flame.

He wanted Daniel to have the reassurance of knowing he was done. He owed him much more than that. No more hiding, no more running. No point. Daniel had opened up to Jack and swallowed him whole. Precisely what he was afraid of. He'd worked out months ago Daniel would reach into every part of him and kill him, this man he'd believed he had to be.

They were here. And all the limits Jack had imposed on himself, on his feelings for Daniel, those had died away when he faced the truth of loving and of being loved. Accepted it. A clean cut, in the end.

Jack...could live with it. He could even be happy. He had Daniel.

"I got *nailed*."

Victory was sweet. Daniel's sensitive hands stroked seductively down Jack's body. "There are compensations," he promised faithfully, closing in for the kill.

Taking the scenic route, Jack blazed his own happy trail south. His eyes widened admiringly. All that? For him? Damn!

"That's one helluva comeback, kid."

Finis